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**CHILE:**

**Student Burning Case**

*The continuing issue of the two youths burned early this month by an Army patrol may provoke new antiregime protests and erode the Army's reputation.*

The decision on Wednesday by the civilian judge investigating the case to detain only one Army lieutenant, release 24 other Army personnel, and turn the case over to the military courts is attracting extraordinary attention among Chileans.

the decision may be a prelude to a whitewash because the military courts may discount the testimony of numerous eyewitnesses—as did the civilian judge—who assert that an Army patrol beat the youths, set them on fire, and dumped them in an isolated area.

the decision outraged opposition political and legal groups, and student and Church groups have protested the government's handling of the case. Many government officials, relieved by the detention of the 25 men last week, now are dismayed. The Catholic Church's human rights organization and the lawyer for the families of the victims have issued a detailed statement, based on eyewitness accounts, which directly contradicts the judge's finding and is receiving heavy media play.

**Comment:** Although senior military officers and some government officials may be worried about the mounting domestic and international criticism, President Pinochet almost certainly wants to avoid an unprecedented military court action against Army personnel for abusing human rights. Nevertheless, unless the military court quickly reverses the civilian judge's findings and convicts at least some Army personnel, public criticism of the regime is likely to increase sharply.

The incident has hurt the Army's prestige with the general public. The Army leadership—fearing similar occurrences—may urge Pinochet to limit the service's police duties and to reduce its role in repressing protests.

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